

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Indigenizing by the Assembling Actors of Riddu Riddu's Ritual / Spectacle

Journal Item

How to cite:

Harvey, Graham (2019). Indigenizing by the Assembling Actors of Riddu Riddu's Ritual / Spectacle. Journal of Ritual Studies, 33(1) pp. 27–37.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://www.pitt.edu/strather/journal.htm>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Contents

Special Issue

Tracing Associations in Pilgrimage and Festival:
Applications of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to Ritual Studies.

Guest Edited Issue by Jens Kreinath

Articles

- Introduction to Tracing Associations in Pilgrimage and Festival:
Applications of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to Ritual Studies.
Jens Kreinath 1
- The Festival Politics of Recognition: Pluralized Ritual-like Performances
of the Polish Woodstock Festival
Grzegorz Brzozowski 12
- Indigenizing by the Assembling Actors of Riddu Riddu's Ritual / Spectacle.
Graham Harvey 27
- Associations and Agents in the Ritual Critique of Power and Behavior:
Nema Kundum *Avudwene* Ceremony
Samuel Etikpah 38
- Tracing Tombs and Trees as Indexes of Saint Veneration Rituals:
Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory and the Hıdırellez Festival in Hatay, Turkey
Jens Kreinath 52
- A Response to *Tracing Associations in Pilgrimage and Festival:
Applications of Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory to Ritual Studies*
Sarah M. Pike 74

Indigenizing by the Assembling Actors of Riddu Riđđu's Ritual / Spectacle.

Graham Harvey
The Open University, UK

Abstract

Reflection on key aspects of a Sámi organised cultural festival generates discussion of relational processes that resonate with and/or expand on Latour's actor-network and composting proposals. Riddu Riđđu is a trans-Indigenous cultural festival, i.e. one that brings together performers, presenters and participants from many Indigenous nations globally. As such, it provides an invaluable lens through which to ignite new thinking about "indigenizing", empathy with customary practices, and ritual as world-making in relational ontologies. The article pays attention to diverse styles of performance to illustrate understandings of ritual, including performances, speech-making and etiquette. The festival's geographical location provides insights into other-than-modernist relations with mountains and rivers as relations. This approach to larger-than-human community casts interesting light on ritual-related discussions.

Keywords: Indigenous, ritual, festival, Sámi, relationality, ontology, kin-based ecology

Riddu Riđđu is an annual indigenous cultural festival organized by a coastal Sámi community in an area simultaneously known as western Sápmi and arctic Norway. It is a complex assembly of participants whose varied journeys, encounters, negotiations, interactions, intentions, and impressions create an event that is at once like other cultural festivals while also being distinctively braided into a global indigenous network.

This article presents ethnographic reflection on several years' participation in the emblematic indigenous festive processes of Riddu Riđđu as a contribution to the REDO (Reassembling Democracy: Ritual as Cultural Resource) project. It benefits from significant publications about relationships between Sámi music, religion, politics and sovereignty (especially Kraft 2009, and Hilder 2014). Because the majority of the performers at Riddu Riđđu are from other indigenous nations globally, my analysis of the festival makes significant use of Robert Jahnke's (2006) discussion of "trans-indigenous practices" and "customary practices". These terms also enable me to apply insights from North American powwows to events in which indigenous people emphasise kinship between humans and their larger-than-human communities and as they animate those relations by ritualising. Much of this might be summed up in Paul C. Johnson's (2002) term "indigenizing" (i.e. "to emphasise local traditions"), thus providing another leitmotif for this article. In short,

this article considers ways in which performative aspects of indigenous festivals enhance the counter-modernist experiment of (re-)indigenization. Through rituals of "worlding" (Tsing 2011), world-making or world-renewal, indigenizing communities re-establish or strengthen local human communities, the global indigenizing movement and, integral to those processes, larger-than-human communities.

In common with other articles in this issue of the journal, Bruno Latour's varied contributions to rethinking interactions, assemblages, constructions of modernity, composing and/or composting of alternative conceptions of human relations with Gaia, and other themes will be germane. Briefly put in Latourian terms, this article focuses on Riddu Riđđu as an indigenous contribution to reassembling human and other-than-human actors as collaborators in social activities, publics and networks which (re-)form the Gaian or larger-than-human world (Latour 2005; 2015). For the most part, what Latour's work contributes to this article is a language resonant with or parallel to the discursive and performative "customary practices" by which indigenous people convey and consolidate their non-anthropocentric sense of moving among that community which we call "the world". The efficacy of Latour's efforts to "reassemble the social" may, perhaps, be seen in his adoption of indigenous-like ways of addressing and redressing the ruptures between hu-

mans and our other-than-human kin. What this might contribute to the study of ritual(s) will be taken up in the conclusion by way of drawing out themes threaded throughout the discussion. In summary, these threads weave an image of Riddu Riđđu and other indigenous events as contexts in which seemingly simple greetings between humans, mountains and rivers are chief among the rituals and etiquettes which, for some participants at least, contribute powerfully to re-making the world and its “kin based ecologies” (Martin 2016).

Riddu Riđđu: Background

Riddu Riđđu means “small storm at the coast” and names a festival hosted in Olmmaivággi (Manndalen in Norwegian) in the municipality of Kåfjord in July each year since 1991. It was initiated in the wake of the Sámi cultural revival — or perhaps the revival of pride in being Sámi which preceded that cultural revival. Riddu Riđđu has grown from being a storm of controversy about what it means to be Sámi, how to express sovereignty and, for some, how to revive traditional religion, to being a storm of cultural creativity. Questions about Sámi culture, identity and sovereignty continue to generate controversy. For example, the annexation of phrases like “Sámi religion” to refer to revived shamanistic or animistic traditions can be resisted by those Læstadian and other Lutheran Christians who think that *Noaidevuohta* (perhaps “shamanism”) should have no place in the contemporary Sámi world. Siv Ellen Kraft notes that although this is less controversial than in the 1980s, some examples of high-profile yoik and drum performances have generated heated debates (2009, 187–189). However, in this article I am interested in those who participate in Riddu Riđđu and the ways in which their activities reshape relations with the world. My analysis is informed by engagement with other indigenous festivals and socialising processes (for example I have participated in a number of powwows at Anishinaabe reservations and Mi’kmaq reserves in the US and Canada, in *hui*, gatherings, in Aotearoa, and in the biennial Origins Festival of First Nations in the UK).

Riddu Riđđu’s website is updated each year, but always includes a summary of the history of the festival. The current “history” page (Riddu 2017) is particularly useful in setting out the festival’s evolution from youthful conversations at a barbeque in 1991 to an international cultural event of considerable significance. It is supported by the Sámi parliament but also recognised as one of twelve annual “hub festivals” by the Norwegian state (presumably indicating at least some level of recognition of Sámi culture and interests). The festival attracts performers from

many indigenous nations globally. For example, it can include Māori bands, Mayan theatre groups, Mongolian throat-singers, exilic rappers, and many others alongside Sámi musicians and actors. Perhaps the majority of festival-goers are Sámi from the nearby locality and from across Sápmi (i.e. the homelands of the various Sámi populations now within Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia). However, busses from regional airports (Tromsø and Alta) enable significant attendance by broader national and international populations, including members from many indigenous nations.

The main festival site is in a bend in a river flowing from the mountains to the nearby coast. A permanent cultural centre (the Center for Northern People) houses the organisers’ offices, a library, gallery and seminar rooms, a performance space, showers and other facilities useful both for the festival and for local people. The site also has a main stage area and nearby spaces that become a market place for indigenous goods and the location of bars for alcoholic and soft drinks. Several food outlets are set up during the festival. A permanent cedar-log long-house (constructed in a style traditional among the Nisga’a First Nation from British Columbia, Canada) is the most prominent construction in an otherwise temporary cultural village in which an earth lodge, lavvus (Sámi tents), tipis, small marquees and other structures are used during the festival for various events and displays. The festival has two main camping areas, a “party field” near the main site and one further away up a hill for families and those desiring a quieter environment. (During the continuous daylight of the arctic summer the sleep patterns of festival-goers do not always coincide.) There is also a youth camp in which local youths meet each year with others invited from another indigenous nation (e.g. Ainu or Evenki) to learn and party together. There is also a parallel children’s programme. In addition to main stage concerts, there are theatrical performances, talks and seminars, art exhibitions, book launches and other literary events and film shows in the cultural centre or in the cedar log-house.

Support from the REDO project has enabled me to attend Riddu Riđđu four times between 2011 and 2015. In addition to being in the audience for performances by headline acts such as Buffy St Marie, Mari Boine, Tribe Called Red, Yat Kha and Violet Road, I have observed performances by theatre groups as diverse as the Mayan Grupo Sotz’il and the Sámi Ferske Scener. These bands and theatre groups are of varying fame but each has appeared more than once at Riddu Riđđu and received a warm, sometimes rapturous welcome from their audiences. They are only mentioned for illustrative purposes

here, but internet searches will return more information about each. Performances and presentations by youth groups and by representatives of the indigenous nations focused on each year have widened the range of events informing my understanding of the festival and those it assembles. I have also sat in on seminars on language revitalisation and indigenous literatures and have observed book launches and film shows. More casual conversations, e.g. with presenters in the cultural village and with other festival-goers in the camp site or elsewhere, have enabled me to ask about the intentions and impressions of participants. My wider interests in indigenous ecological knowledges and animism (ways of treating the world as a community of persons, most of whom are other-than-human, all of whom deserve respect; see Harvey 2005) have led me to pay attention to the larger-than-human context of the festival. As I am not alone in this, I have had interesting conversations with other festival-goers (more in passing than as organised interviews) beside the river about salmon, trout, ravens, rivers and mountains. As a vegan visiting the arctic, food has been an understandable obsession, but I have also become involved in conversations about what is probably the most common form of inter-species relationality, namely eating or being eaten.

It is also worth noting that although each Riddu Riddu festival is different, some are more distinctive than others. For example, during the 2011 Riddu Riddu festival, Anders Breivik committed his murderous attack in Oslo and Utøya. The geographical distance between the festival site and Breivik's ritualised assault on multiculturalism and leftist politics did nothing to mitigate the shock to people at the festival. More will be said later about the intensification of ritualization during the single concert which concluded the festival. The 2014 festival was also distinctive because global climate change led to significantly increased melt water flowing rapidly from the mountains through the river that almost surrounds the festival site. More will be said about this as it heightened the urgency of conversations about indigenous ecological knowledges, including a powerful example of understandings about responsibility and mutuality between species.

Pan- and Trans-Indigeneity in Powwows and Festivals

Indigenous peoples and cultures became increasingly visible to wider communities in the mid-twentieth century, largely initiated by indigenous insistence on political and communal self-determination, and cultural pride. Among other effects, this led to some popular gatherings taking on more activist flavours, contributing to on-going

processes of de-colonisation or anti-colonisation. For example, at some North American powwows the value for local communities of assembling and celebrating was emphasised without detracting from the sense of festive entertainment. Alongside the competitive dances, participants elaborated traditional performative, costume, and culinary styles. The protocols of ceremony evolved to emphasise both initiatory and purification rites (including but not limited to sweat lodges and world-renewal ceremonies in particular places).

Indigenous cultural vitality, communal well-being, sovereignty, and ecological responsibility became foundational rather than merely sideshows at some powwows. A radical example is the "Honor the Earth" powwow at Lac Courte Oreilles/Odaawaazaaga'iganing, which began in 1973 as an element of a protest against the Winter dam, seen as a desecration of indigenous land and a violation of treaties and sovereignty. The powwow continues to weave competitive and virtuoso dance performance into a tapestry of opportunities for socialising and the honouring of relationship with places and the local emplaced (larger-than-human) community. Not all participants are primarily motivated by the radicalism or environmentalism of the powwow's origins (as evidenced by the creation of a committee to disseminate more information on that history). Visually and sonically, "Honor the Earth" can seem so much like any other powwow that it might be described as an example of "pan-Indian" rather than of Anishinaabe culture. However, it would be a mistake to think that "pan-Indian" is synonymous with "inauthentic". Pan-Indian and pan-indigenous cultural and political assemblages have been, and continue to be, significant contributors to the evolution of varied local and global indigeneities. It would also be a mistake to think that participants are unaware or un-reflexive about the tension between local traditions and wider (regional, national or global) ways of doing indigeneity. My impression from conversations with dancers, drummers, and other audience members at Anishinaabe and Mi'kmaq powwows (in what is now Wisconsin, USA, and Newfoundland, Canada) is that people are well aware of the relatively recent origins of powwows and of those elements called "traditional" within them. Indeed, "traditional" in this context is often used primarily as a contrast with "competitive" (i.e. events in which dancers compete for prizes). Even when the term is employed to speak of ancestral heritages or established practices, participants are generally far from naïve and are often creative about such matters.

Tradition and novelty, global (pan-indigeneity) and local (specific nation), ancestral and current, and other facets of contemporary indigenous cultures are among

the “frictions” which make movement and relationships possible (Tsing 2004). Critics who fail to see the creativity of these frictions are unlikely to grasp what is most appealing about indigenous festivals and indigeneity. They might indicate this by using terms like “pan-Indian” and “pan-indigenous” to imply or assert the blandness or falsity of events, activities and/or of entire cultures. A far more interesting and useful distinction is made by Robert Jahnke in relation to visual art and elaborated on by Chadwick Allen in relation to literature. In Allen’s summary:

Māori artist and art scholar Robert Jahnke has developed a conceptual model for contemporary Māori visual art that imagines a continuum running between the pole “customary” (art created by Māori that maintains “a visual correspondence with historical models”) and its opposite pole, “non-customary” (art created by Māori in which “visual correspondence and empathy with historical models [is] absent”). Much of contemporary Māori art is produced in the vast middle space between these poles, Jahnke argues, and it is neither “hybrid” nor caught “between” but “trans-customary”: art that establishes not a strict correspondence with customary forms but rather a “visual empathy with customary practice” through the use of “pattern, form, medium and technique”. (Allen 2012, 153, citing Jahnke 2006, 48–50)

Allen emphasises that Jahnke’s key distinction is between strict correspondence with customary forms and visual empathy with customary practice.

The “vast middle space” of trans-customary practice becomes the domain of the “trans-indigenous” in Allen’s own extensive discussion of “global native literary studies”. The “trans-indigenous” is the assembling together of interacting communities and cultures, speakers and listeners in a richly storied world, and of actors, entertainers, educators and their audiences and respondents. The majority of the practice of performing and visual arts at Riddu Riđđu and at other indigenous festivals is in that trans-indigenous, trans-customary mode. Patterns, forms, media and techniques draw on historical customary practices to produce new riffs that are recognisably indigenous and contemporary. Headline acts on Riddu Riđđu’s main stage frequently illustrate this. Thus, a Tuvan zither (a *yat kha*) might be played to accompany not only the Tuvan *kanzat kargyraa* throat singing style, but also indigenized reggae, rock or country genres. First Nation Canadian and Māori bands invite Sámi colleagues to meld yoik chants into their performances. Indeed, yoik chants

and chanters (sometimes “yoikers”) form one of the most common and evident hubs of a network of varied genres, styles, and performances which shape Riddu Riđđu’s trans-indigenous indigenizing. Frequent references to the authority of Nils-Aslak Valkepää (late poet-laureate of Sápmi, whose revitalization of yoik as a contemporary art form with historical inspiration is widely celebrated) suggest a precise match with Jahnke’s “trans-indigenous middle ground”. More on perspectives and acts like these will follow.

It is also noteworthy that it is possible to illustrate the whole range of Jahnke’s continuum at Riddu Riđđu, at least in the rhetoric of some participants. Claims to meet the criteria of the customary pole (corresponding with historical models) might be encountered among those Sámi yoik chanters who assemble at the festival’s fringes (in the campsites and in ad hoc gatherings elsewhere) and insist that their style, unaccompanied by instruments, is “pure and traditional” in contrast with the “modern” forms presented on the main stage. In material culture form, customary arts are present in Siberian carved wooden talismans and in the hand-drums which replicate historical Sámi models. The non-customary pole (without correspondence or empathy with historical models) is rare but perhaps not entirely absent. By definition, an indigenous festival is unlikely to privilege entirely non-customary acts. However, perhaps it can be illustrated by a performer who began her act by greeting her audience with “hello Norway!” (rather than “hello Sápmi!” perhaps) and then made no obvious reference either to the Sámi hosting of the festival or to her own (probable) indigenous origins. It is, of course, possible that I am at fault in having failed to recognise sonic, lyrical or other evidences of empathy with customary indigenous forms or practices in her act. However, in a couple of conversations with other festival-goers (one being a performer), I noted references to a shared surprise at this performance.

Jahnke’s continuum can also be illustrated in the food shared or offered for sale in various venues around the site. At the customary end of the scale, fish and reindeer meals are always evident at food stands and in the campsites. Indigenous groups from beyond Sápmi bring dried seal meat, biltong, yak butter, maize dishes and other foods to aid their presentation of their cultures. The availability of vegetarian food on some stands in recent years could demonstrate a willingness to include the non-customary for a predominantly arctic and sub-arctic event. Perhaps, however, this illustrates respect for those indigenous groups whose diet includes less consumption of animal products. To test the boundaries (and partly out of necessity given my own dietary choices) I enquired at

one food stand if they had anything for vegans. I was told “we have whale burgers”, laughingly, followed by an explanation, “well, it is local food”. In fact, they did have some suitable veggie-burgers but, more interestingly, my enquiry led to conversations in which several locals argued as to whether or not whale hunting or consumption had been a significant feature of historical subsistence for coastal Sámi. As is true of the performance styles of the festival, the majority food culture is trans-indigenous: prioritising fish and reindeer meat but serving them alongside maize and other foods which have culturally significant origins in other indigenous communities.

Entertaining and ritualizing

Festivals vary considerably but they are rarely devoted solely to spectacle and entertainment. Often, they also entail educative and transformative possibilities. Sometimes their most spectacular events are rooted in ritual or acts for which people recognise the protocols, etiquette or expectations. Sometimes they affect people strongly and deserve positive comparison with rituals. There is an obvious sense in which Riddu Riddu is a space outside or alongside the quotidian for many participants (though perhaps less so for performers on tour, their managers, the festival organising team, or the catering companies involved). It would, however, be a mistake to think of these participants as solitary individuals, or of their transformation only in personal or individual ways. When Thomas Hilder writes of the “important role of the Riddu Riddu festival in nurturing processes of reflection and transformation”, he is referring to emergent communal, regional and transnational exchanges and changes. He sees the festival, and broader Sámi musical performance, as offering “models of conceptualizing geopolitical organization that transcends national borders” (2014, 222). While my focus in this section is not on (imagined/modernist) individuals, it is somewhat narrower than Hilder’s: it is on those who participate in and are (potentially) transformed by Riddu Riddu. For them, assembling together at the festival enables *communitas* (Victor Turner 1969, ^{132–66}) and/or collective joy (Edith Turner 2012). At the very least, interactions between bands and fans (or potential fans) creates, renews and/or strengthens relational bonds and festive moods. More than this happens in the midst of performances which seem closer kin to rituals than entertaining spectacle.

Riddu Riddu is certainly organised to present festival-goers with opportunities for varied forms of joy alongside varied kinds of transformation. Main stage acts which highlight the creativity and skillfulness of indigenous per-

formers take priority. For some members of the assembled audience it is enough to enjoy the experience. For others, the same experience increases awareness of and/or pride in being indigenous. Seeing skilled performers from indigenous communities putting on as good a show as one has ever seen increases the sense of potential for all festival-goers. Subtly or explicitly, it inspires a sense that resistance to marginalisation, disenfranchisement and/or assimilation can be effective — and even pleasurable. In addition, those who participate in seminars and workshops may seek more active roles in indigenous communities (perhaps as learners or teachers of indigenous languages), more understanding of sovereignty issues, more certainty about their own indigeneity, or a firmer grasp of the global implications of climate change. In that sense such seminars and workshops can be somewhat initiatory, increasing commitment to causes and/or cultures. When, as is often the case, these events are conducted according to particular indigenous protocols (e.g. self-identification in relation to places, elders and ancestors; seeking respectful resolutions or respectfully differing; using indigenous concepts) audience members may increase their understanding of what it can mean to be indigenous or to indigenise.

The predominant but not exclusive concern of theatrical performances at Riddu Riddu also seems to be with understanding and vitalising personal and/or communal indigeneity. Acts such as Ferske Scener’s “Just another Sámi” are rooted in a globally pervasive gap between indigenous ancestry and contemporary identities and self-identifications. The premise of “Just another Sámi” is that many Sámi do not know that they are Sámi, that generations of Sámi have abandoned cultural and linguistic knowledges and abilities, and that many in the current generation wish to reverse this trend. They do so in part by emphasising cultural elements which survived because they had currency in subsistence related activities (e.g. fishing or reindeer herding) or were technically useful in other ways (e.g. elaborations of lavvu style tents). As happens elsewhere, people may have visited museum collections to see and then replicate ancestral artefacts such as drums and the symbols that adorn them. Similarly, archived folklore and folk-music collections can provide repositories of information and inspiration for recovering and elaborating ways of becoming or being Sámi today. The construction of new drums and experimentation with their sonic possibilities, alongside yoik chanting and supported by trans-indigenous learning, have contributed to debates about animistic knowledges and to the evolution of trans-cultural forms of shamanic ritual and experience. By harmonising a Siberian style animistic throat

chant with an atmospheric cello piece on a stage empathetic with Sámi ancestral material culture, “Just another Sámi” assembles these diverse experiences of exclusion and recovery as an experiment in culture building.

As noted earlier, during the 2011 Riddu Ridđu festival, Breivik committed his atrocity in Oslo and Utøya. The festival was profoundly affected. Many people left to support family and friends. International and local performers decided to join together to create a memorial concert that would offer a response to what was becoming known about events. Ánde Somby (yoik exponent and lead vocalist of the Sámi group Vajas) acted as MC, summed up what was known about the attack, and spoke movingly about the value of freedom and democracy. Sámi and other indigenous flags seemed more evident on stage than on previous occasions but seemed to express solidarity rather than any separatist message. The Māori band Moana and the Tribe demonstrated the creative results of trans- and multi-culturalism by their fusion of traditional Māori styles and contemporary global performance. The concert ended with an equally powerful performance by Yat Kha and an impassioned speech by their lead vocalist and guitarist Albert Kuvezin. He praised those he’d met at the festival and those he’d seen on the TVs that everyone had been watching in the cultural centre as events unfolded. He contrasted this with what he saw as hysteria and hasty judgement after the New York World Trade Center attack. Having sounded somewhat like the Dalai Lama in his calming tones and measured responses, in celebrating a culture that welcomed others and did not move swiftly to vitriolic fervour, he ended with a surprisingly loud denunciation of “that crazy man” who had committed the Oslo and Utøya attacks. As noted by Hilder, the audience was solemn (2014, 219), both, I think, because we were genuinely moved and because that mood was appropriate to the mourning rituals of what seemed to be a wake. There was, however, significant acclamation for a concert which refused to subdue or silence indigenous answering-back to violence and the death-wish of hegemonic cultural monotony. As Hilder says,

Riddu Ridđu drew on its long history of articulating cultural resistance, building transnational solidarity, and strengthening cultural diversity by setting as its 2012 theme Sámi and indigenous activism. During the opening ceremony of the festival the new festival leader, Kirsti Lervoll, introduced the year’s theme, paid respect to the victims of 22 July attack, and explained the relevance of the festival in resisting the ideologies that Breivik stood

for. The performance of a joik by Inga Juuso acted as an official memorial to the victims of the previous year’s attack, highlighting the power of joik to express grief and mourning as well as political resistance. Throughout the festival there were cultural performances that reignited memories of Sámi activism. (2014, 219)

Events at the 2011 and 2012 Riddu Ridđu festivals provide stark examples of ways in which rituals and spectacle or entertainment can fuse. Equally, as is clear in Hilder’s summary, they emphasise, express, and (re)ignite indigenous activism, resistance and answering-back to those who would diminish indigeneity. However, indigeneity is not only about humans and their cultures. It also involves the wider the human world. The following section, therefore, attends to the contribution of Riddu Ridđu to processes of indigenising.

Performance in a larger than human world

The previous sections have set out a limited view of who assembles at Riddu Ridđu. They have focused primarily on the humans: especially the performers and their audiences. The discussion so far may have suggested, as much academic writing does, that humans perform our lives in largely inert contexts or environments. Everything else is background or stage. It would be unfortunate to suggest that the festival field, campsite, surrounding river, dale and mountains, are scenery, accidental to the primary action of the festival, or that they are “(wild) nature”. Instead, much of what happens at Riddu Ridđu, and much that defines indigeneity, resists that de-animation of the world. Just as Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel’s (2005) double use of “thing” — i.e. to refer to “objects” and to “assemblies” or “councils” — enables us to recognise the inter-active cooperation of lively things (instruments, flags, sets, stages), so we need to grasp how places assemble larger-than-human communities.

In any analysis that seeks to understand what takes place and makes relations in indigenous communities, the notion that humans are separate from the larger than human community (of mountains, rivers, guitars, and flags) should be challenged as an ontological and relational impossibility. Indigenous cultural traditions are not often heavily invested in the distinction between culture and nature. Therefore, attending to the larger-than-human community should not be an optional extra or a rhetorical aside in discussions of indigenous activities and relations. Followers of Latour’s (1993) notion that “we

have never been modern” as well as those committed to rethinking ecology in the Anthropocene will likely note that the nature/culture distinction has never really been more than a project of those who have tried (with limited but ecocidal effects) to be(come) moderns. Riddu Riððu offers many explicit challenges to that project, most powerfully in performative expressions of indigenising moves. Thus, this section illustrates ways in which Riddu Riððu both assembles and deconstructs whatever the words “culture” and “nature” involve elsewhere, aiming to replace them with a notion of place as community.

In her several appearances at Riddu Riððu festivals Moana (lead signer of Moana and the Tribe) opens her band’s set by calling “From our mountains to your mountains, from our rivers to your rivers”. These translated elements of traditional Māori greetings have many braided implications. They acknowledge the importance of knowing and belonging to ancestral homelands made of (or by) mountains and rivers. They acknowledge and celebrate emerging relations between Māori and Sámi communities and between their homelands. They reinforce relations between those who greet and those who are greeted (mountains and rivers), and between the humans who convey or mediate those greetings. They acknowledge the priority of the local hosting community who live among these particular mountains and rivers. They place hosts and guests, locals and visitors, organisers and performers, in relation to indigenous traditional knowledges. They enact indigenous protocols. They assemble performers and audiences as people who pay attention to mountains and rivers, conveying greetings across great distances. They resist the notion that location is mere space or backdrop by insisting that mountains and rivers can and do wish to share greetings, to welcome guests, and to involve humans in relationships. They make the world an assembly of mountain and river communities rather than a duality of culture and nature. They animate relations with the larger-than-human world. They make a Māori band and its time on the Riddu Riððu stage more than entertainment or a spectacle. They push those present to at least consider indigenizing, committing to the remaking of the world as a community or network of communities. There may be more possibilities. These are further enacted in the rest of the performance.

A similar set of implications arises in each yoik performed or offered at the festival. Yoiking provides another excellent example of Jahnke’s trans-customary model. It resonates with traditional cultural practices and is elaborated in contemporary ways, e.g. on Riddu Riððu’s main stage and in ad hoc gatherings in the cultural village and campsites. Perhaps the debates about how yoiking

could or should be performed are also part of the trans-customary trajectory. At any rate, I sought to understand a performance style which was unfamiliar to me by asking a range of other festival-goers about the practice. In doing so I learnt more about the diversity of those assembled as the Riddu Riððu festival. Everyone agreed that yoiking is distinctively Sámi, and that it has a long but broken history as it was demonised as either anti-Christian or primitive by those seeking to assimilate Sámi into wider politics. Beyond that, most people were pleased that many international performers honoured Sámi culture by including yoikers at some point in their acts. Like the Sámi flag and Sámi costumes, the prevalence of yoiks make Riddu Riððu distinctive from indigenous festivals elsewhere, and heightens awareness by festival-goers (and anyone who sees media reports) of the growing strength of Sámi-ness. The presence and yoiking of high profile Sámi performers, such as Mari Boine, is always a cause of loud acclamation. For some, yoiking is intimately associated with shamanism, often understood as a single pan-arctic and Eurasian religion (see Kraft 2009, 2015). In that context, it may be understood to be a sonic driver, like drum rhythms, propelling people into trance or on journeys. On the strand of a fjord near a house built for Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, I was told with considerable insistence and apparent authority, that yoiks are gifts to those who are yoiked, and that they are not so much *about* their subject as they *are* that person (whether mountain, reindeer, adolescent, elder, sunrise, or other). There is, in that understanding, no culture/nature dichotomy, there are only relations sharing understanding of each other. The yoiker gains some understanding of the other and sings it back to them as a gift. Conversations back at the festival site suggested that this is a popular understanding. It was illustrated both in yoiks honouring the festival organisers or other performers and in yoiks addressed to the hills and river that make Manndalen. As Anna Tsing says, “worlds come into being at the encounter — and at best they explain the encounter” (2011, 63).

Hilder offers an expansion of these ideas about yoiks and yoiking. He sums up a stage in his discussion as concluding that

Sámi musical performance has played a significant role in the revival and articulation of Sámi attachments to place. In particular, I argued that Sámi musical performance, by highlighting the human dimension of remote regions, transforms land long perceived to be a “wilderness” into a “cultured homeland.” . . . Sámi musical performance, through reviving a nature-based cosmology, subverting no-

tions of “wilderness,” and commenting on global warming, proposes an environmental “ethic” in which humans are a part of nature. (Hilder 2014, 221)

Kraft also notes the adoption of the idea of “nature religion” among some Sámi activists and educators (2009, 185). But “nature” seems as unhelpful as “wilderness” in conveying much of what is happening in these debates or at Riddu Riddu. As elsewhere, they certainly contest the notion that religions with a worldly focus or those with a non-supernaturalist core are not truly religions (Morrison 1992, 2013; Harvey 2013). Nonetheless, just as there is no wilderness — as a domain untouched by humanity or culture — so yoiks suggest there is no nature — as a domain separated from human culture (also see Harvey 2012). There is only and everywhere a communicative community, the members of which may give and receive gifts (e.g. of song and mutual knowledge). It is in the evocation of practices empathetic with customary world making traditions that the indigenizing trajectory of Riddu Riddu is most evident.

Kin based ecologies and global climate change

As a “nature” from which humans are absent or disconnected disappears, so an ecology of relations, a realm of kinship responsibility is (re-)asserted (e.g. Cavender Wilson, 1996; Martin and Garrett 2010; Kimmerer 2012). Against separation, indigenous ecologies generally assert mutual responsibility and cooperation. Elders educate the young in appropriate ways to behave in the larger-than-human world. By example, story-telling and negotiated participation in rituals they drive assumptions of respectful relationality “deep into the bone” (Grimes 2000) of succeeding generations.

In 2014 the river that flows around three sides of the Riddu Riddu festival site came very near to flooding the site. Global climate change had led to the ice on the mountains melting faster and in greater quantities than usual. Seminars and conversations about climate change in the arctic and globally are not unusual at the festival or other indigenous events. But the river’s height and the rapidity of its flow generated considerable attention. For me, one conversation highlighted the issues as they related to indigenous knowledges. As I watched the river overflowing rocks on which ravens often sit, a local man told me, “This isn’t good for us, but it’s a disaster for the trout and even more so the salmon”. He explained that the fish were currently waiting to swim up the river to spawn. They too

have their homelands, their indigeneity. The flow and near ice-cold temperature of the water prevented them. The man asserted that the trout might just find another river. But, he said, the salmon would only return to the river of their birth. If the river flow kept them away, there would be no more salmon in this river. I might have misremembered whether it was trout and salmon that are most particular about their rivers. Equally, the man might have been misinformed. My point in summarising the conversation is that this man appeared to be repeating what other local people were concerned about. While the threat to fish has clear dangers to coastal Sámi livelihoods —and perhaps to aspects of the cultural renaissance Riddu Riddu is encouraging—, it was absolutely clear that concern for the well-being and the culture of the fish and other river beings was the major issue. No yoik was offered, only deep concern and a sense of regret that human greed had caused this problem.

For me, this moment has gained the stature of the often-repeated conversation between the anthropologist Irving Hallowell and an unnamed (but respected) Anishinaabe elder near Canada’s Berens River in the 1930s. Seeking to understand Anishinaabe grammar as a way of grasping their ontology and behaviour towards other-than-human persons, Hallowell asked if all the nearby rocks were alive. The elder replied “No, but *some* are” (Hallowell 1960, 24, original emphasis). For Hallowell and many of us involved in research identified as the “new animism” (see Harvey 2005), this enigmatic answer opened up new understandings of relational ontologies. Rocks might always be accorded animate gender in Anishinaabe grammar, but the interesting question is not whether all rocks are alive rather than inert. Anishinaabe traditions inculcate the assumption that rocks and all other existences have the potential to act relationally, to give and receive gifts, to assemble as actors in networks (as Latour might say). Thus, the question and answer which Hallowell discusses begin to reveal themselves as concerning specific acts of relationship. The elder might offer gifts to nearby rocks. They might act towards him purposefully and generously. Relationality, like “society” in Latour’s argument (e.g. 2005), is not a fixed thing. It is a dynamic ebb and flow of specific acts. Indeed, if we take Hallowell’s elder’s message to heart, we should be less interested in the “actors” than in the “networks” or meshworks of activities in which they relate (Latour 2014, 80; Ingold 2007, 80; 2011, 84–86). Then the question might be: What greetings or gifts activate relationships? My encounter with a man concerned with fish negatively affected by climate change is similarly freighted with relational interactions. Climate change may be global but at

that moment particular fish in a particular river concerned a particular man and his community. Inter-species relationality might be a thoroughly indigenous cultural emphasis, even a definitive element of (trans-)indigeneity, but it is a theme elaborated from many vital local acts and encounters. Perhaps, after all, the man was yoiking.

Conclusion

I do not imagine that everyone at Riddu Riddu is deeply involved in Sámi political or cultural activism. Many (including activists) are certainly there primarily because the music is good. However, much of the music and many of the protocols of speech-making and performance arise from and express indigenous traditions. As a whole, Riddu Riddu is a complex ritual that, sometimes subtly, propels processes of indigenization. Expressions of respect for mountains and rivers and of concern or grief for fish evidence the vitality of repertoires of indigenous world-making, world-renewal or relationship-building ceremonies. Everyone gets to hear songs and witness gestures towards the world which evoke a re-assembling of humans as participants in relationships, many of which are with indigenous communities and larger-than-human communities.

It may well be that there is more empathy than strict historical accuracy in the ways in which indigenous traditions are evolving into contemporary trans-indigenous practices. What is most evident at Riddu Riddu and in other indigenous festivals is not the revival of “pure” tradition. Nor is there a purification process of rejecting “modernity”. It is precisely the nature of tradition as it is understood and practised among indigenous people (and perhaps everyone except the “invention of tradition” crew) that it is not a blueprint but a sketch of themes that have worked out well before and might serve again. Not every Sámi wishes to resort to *noaidi* and their rituals. Not everyone is inspired to yoik their local hills in an animistic manner. As Tsing says “worlding is simultaneously orienting and disorienting” (2011, 63) and the re-assembling of indigenous (larger-than-human) communities requires considerable negotiation and flexibility. It often rubs up against the ingrained habits of centuries of assimilation into dominating cultures. At Riddu Riddu there are not only performers and audiences who identify as traditionalists but others who are willing to celebrate some but not all aspects of their heritage. At the festival’s extremes there are people whose experience of Læstadian and other forms of Christianity has provoked only anger and rebellion, and others who find it possible to adapt, even fusing Læstadian hymns with animistic yoiks as they

explore contemporary Sámi identities. Much the same is almost certainly true of indigenous people from elsewhere who have faced different dominating cultural pressures, e.g. Buddhist and Soviet oppositions to central Asian indigeneities.

Indigeneity is not a static identity but a continuously negotiated practice. Indeed, how could the relational ontologies which define most indigenous cultures be static? The processes by which people gain pride in their indigeneity and by which they (re)learn traditional etiquette for engaging across species boundaries require fluidity, experiment and transformation. Riddu Riddu is a complex ritual in which those assembled in a relatively remote dale in Sápmi engage in a long-term experiment with the possibilities of indigenous relational protocols and rituals. It seems to be creating a lot of joy as well as enabling people to face varied traumas and blend their responses into the making of a counter-modernist world of respectful larger-than-human community building.

Resonances with Latour’s scholarship will have been evident throughout this article. Of particular importance is his insistence that there is no “society” but only acts of socialising which form and reform, assemble and re-assemble dynamically. His “Compositionist Manifesto” (2010) might have cited indigeneity as a prime example of a socialising that is not a secure identity but a process of composting and composing heterogeneous concerns (“traditions”) into ways of being and acting that seek the well-being of those it assembles. Latour’s “political platform”, his “compositionism”, re-states the agenda of many at Riddu Riddu and in wider indigenizing movements:

From universalism it takes up the task of building a common world; from relativism, the certainty that this common world has to be built from utterly heterogeneous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material. (2010, 474)

If Latour were an Anishinaabe scholar he would have deployed the term *bimaadiziwin* (Gross 2014, 205–224) to sum this effort to compose a good way of living among others, using existing resources to shape a “common world”. International musical stars enabled by globalised mobility and finance re-compose traditional greetings, speeches and chants with those among whom they assemble a currently workable good way of living.

Concomitantly, Latour’s frequent assertion that what scholars study is not those fictive “societies” but the specific acts and encounters in which people make, shape and break networks is paralleled by the theme of relationality

familiar in all significant studies of indigenous knowledges and practices. Latour's contribution to re-assembling the scholarly community is to challenge the deconstructive negativity that claims the label "critique" and to ask, instead,

can we become critical again, in the sense here offered by Turing? That is, generating more ideas than we have received, inheriting from a prestigious critical tradition but not letting it die away, or "dropping into quiescence" like a piano no longer struck. This would require that all entities, including computers, cease to be objects defined simply by their inputs and outputs and become again things, mediating, assembling, gathering many more folds. (Latour 2004: 248, citing Turing 1950, 454)

What I have attempted to do in this article is to generate "more ideas" from those I have received at Riddu

Riddu and from colleagues engaged by indigenous matters. In particular, I have proposed that greetings to mountains and concerns about rivers assemble with varied musical genres enrich our studies of rituals in the real (post-"nature/culture") "deep world" (Grimes 2013). Implicit here is the recognition, following Latour, that studying ritual involves following not only the actors but especially the acts and interactions that make up events and communities — and, indeed, make actors as relations. This much seems relatively commonplace in ritual studies. The recognition that modernist discourses and practices fix other-than-human relations in the position of stage or scenery demands contestation and composting into the revelation that ritual (and all interactions) breaches the certainty of human exceptionalism. Finally, then, Latour's work flows together with indigenous knowledges to promote approaches to ritual(s) as contributors to thoroughly relational ontologies.

References

- Allen, Chadwick. 2012. *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cavender Wilson, Angela. 1996. "Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family." *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (1): 7–13.
- Grimes, Ronald. 2000. *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Grimes, Ronald. 2013. "Performance is Currency in the Deep World's Gift Economy: An Incantatory Riff for a Global Medicine Show," In *Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, edited by Graham Harvey, 501–512. New York: Routledge.
- Gross, Lawrence. 2014. *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*. New York: Routledge.
- Hallowell, A. Irving. 1960. "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View." In *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, edited by Stanley Diamond, 19–52. Columbia University Press. [Reprinted in Graham Harvey (ed.). 2002. *Readings in Indigenous Religions*. London: Continuum. pp. 18–49.]
- Harvey, Graham. 2005. *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. London: Hurst.
- Harvey, Graham. 2012. "Ritual is Etiquette in the Larger than Human World: Collaborating with Wild Persons in Contemporary Eco-Paganism." In *Wilderness Mythologies: Wilderness in the History of Religions*, edited by Laura Feldt, 265–291. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Harvey, Graham. 2013. *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Hilder, Thomas. 2014. *Sámi Musical Performance and the Politics of Indigeneity in Northern Europe*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ingold, Tim. 2007. *Lines: A Brief History*. London: Routledge.
- Ingold, Tim. 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge.
- Jahnke, Robert. 2006. "Māori Art towards the Millennium." In *State of the Māori Nation: Twenty-first Century Issues in Aotearoa*, edited by Malcolm Mulholland, 41–51. Auckland: Reed.
- Johnson, Paul C. 2002. "Migrating Bodies, Circulating Signs: Brazilian Candomblé, the Garifuna of the Caribbean, and the Category of Indigenous Religions." *History of Religions* 41 (4): 301–327.
- Kimmerer, Robin W. 2012. "Searching for Synergy: Integrating Traditional and Scientific Ecological Knowledge in Environmental Science Education." *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 2: 317–323.
- Kraft, Siv Ellen. 2009. "Sami Indigenous Spirituality: Religion and Nation-building in Norwegian Sápmi." *Temenos* 45 (2): 179–206.

- Kraft, Siv Ellen. 2015. "Shamanism and Indigenous Soundscapes: The Case of Mari Boine." In *Nordic Neoshamanisms*, edited by Siv Ellen Kraft, Trude Fonneland, James R. Lewis, 235–262. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–248.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2010. "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'." *New Literary History* 41: 471–490.
- Latour, Bruno. 2014. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2015. "Waiting for Gaia: Composing the Common World through Art and Politics." In *What is Cosmopolitical Design?*, edited by Albena Yaneva and Alejandro Zaera-Polo, 21–33. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel (eds). 2005. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Karlsruhe: Zentrum für Kunst- und Medientechnologie.
- Martin, Kathleen J. 2016. Seminar Discussion at Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Native American Religious Traditions, San Antonio.
- Martin, Kathleen J., and James J. Garrett. 2010. "Teaching and Learning with Traditional Indigenous Knowledge in the Tall Grass Plains." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 30 (2): 289–314.
- Morrison, Kenneth M. 1992. "Beyond the Supernatural: Language and Religious Action." *Religion* 22: 201–205.
- Morrison, Kenneth M. 2013. "Animism and a Proposal for a Post-Cartesian Anthropology." In *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, edited by Graham Harvey, 38–52. New York: Routledge.
- Riddu 2017. <http://riddu.no/en/about-riddu-riddu-festivala/history-riddu-riddu> (accessed 15 Oct 2017)
- Tsing, Anna L. 2004. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, Anna L. 2011. "Worlding the Matsutake Diaspora or, Can Actor-Network Theory Experiment with Holism?" In *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology*, edited by Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt, 47–66. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turing, Alan M. 1950. "Computing Machinery and Intelligence." *Mind* 59: 433–460.
- Turner, Edith. 2012. *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

Note

1. I am grateful to Marianne Henriksen for skilful introductions to much of importance at the festival and in Sápmi — as well as for translations and help getting to Kåfjord.